THE

# PREMIUM.

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150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

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"I think I am sure of one premium at least," said little Edward, as he placed himself upon the form among his school-fellows.

It was examination-day, and many a young heart was beating quick with the hope of approbation and reward, or with the fear of disgrace. Some had looked forward to this day, and applied to their tasks, as knowing how carefully they should be examined, and commended or punished according to their deservings; while others had chosen to forget that such a day must come, and idled away the time which they would now have

given a great deal to have at their disposal again.

You will own these boys were both foolish and faulty. How much more so are they who neglect to bear in mind the *great examination at the great judgment-day;* by sinful and unprofitable lives "treasuring up for themselves wrath against that day of wrath?"

In the centre of the school-room was placed a long table, covered with books of various sizes and of different value. There were Bibles and Testaments, both large and small: the histories of Rome, of Greece, and of England. There were volumes elegantly bound, and pamphlets just stitched together. The school was extensive, and it was wished that every one who had exerted himself to the best of his ability, however little that might be, should carry home with him some mark of encouragement, to remind him that diligence and perseverance were not overlooked.

Like the servants to whom their Lord entrusted the talents, some had five, and some had but one; yet these last could not be excused for hiding and neglecting it because it was small: even the youngest and the simplest child at school may

make something of the reason and the opportunities which the Lord has given him to improve.

With anxious hearts and busy faces the little boys arranged themselves around the table; and were examined with great care and patience by their teachers, as to the progress they had made in their studies.

Now, Edward had set his heart upon one particular premium, the Roman History, neatly bound, and making two very pretty volumes, which he thought would handsomely fill up a vacant space on his little book-shelves. He allowed himself to think of this until no other prize was of any value in his sight: a great fault, often committed by children, and grown people too; who, instead of thankfully receiving whatever the bounty of Providence assigns them, would choose for themselves; and become discontented and unhappy in the midst of blessings, because the wisdom of God sees fit to withhold some one thing that their folly deems necessary to their happiness.

Edward passed his examination with much credit, and one of the first premiums was adjudged to him; but, instead of the Roman History, a

very neat Bible, in an excellent large type, was placed in his hands. Many of his school-mates had wished for that Bible, but Edward regarded it not; and the eyes of the foolish little boy filled with tears as he saw the elegant History of Rome presented to another, who, perhaps, would gladly have exchanged with him.

The next day Edward returned home and related his disappointment to his parents, who thought his desire for the Roman History a mark of great learning and taste; but since he had distinguished himself so well, they did not much care what prize he received.

Edward's father lived in the country, not far from the sea-side, in a most delightful and healthy situation; and at this time his mother's brother, who was in a very sickly state, had just arrived there to enjoy the benefit of the sea breezes, and rest a little from the toil and bustle of his employments in London.

Mr. Lewis was a young man of the most pleasing manners and appearance. He was gentle and serious, but not at al' gloomy or severe. His bad health only served to show forth his pa-

tience in enduring it without a murmuring word or discontented look; and Edward, who was really a kind-hearted and affectionate boy, soon became very much attached to his uncle, who had not seen him since he was an infant, and who was much pleased at the attentions his nephew delighted to pay him.

Young hearts are soon won; and it was only three days after Edward's return from school, that he went bounding over the grounds in search of his uncle, whose society he already preferred to his hoop and ball.

Mr. Lewis was seated under a fine old oak, the high and knotted roots of which served as a bench; while the softest moss, interspersed with many delicate little flowers, was like a carpet beneath his feet. A rich and extensive tract of country lay spread before his eyes; and, at a distance the mighty ocean bounded the prospect, whose deep green waters were seen in beautiful contrast with the pale yellow cliff, that with a graceful, yet abrupt curve, interrupted the view to the right. Thin clouds were floating past the sun every now and then, and threw all the varieties of light and shade upon the lovely scene below.

Mr. Lewis had a book in his hand, into which he frequently looked, and then raised his eyes again to gaze upon the varieties that surrounded

him; and so intent he seemed, that Edward doubted whether he ought to disturb him, until his uncle, seeing him at some little distance, kindly beckoned him to come near.

"Is not this a pretty place, uncle?" said Edward, as he seated himself beside him; "and do you not find the breeze from the water very refreshing?"

"It is beautiful indeed, my dear boy; and I am deriving both refreshment and instruction while I look around me."

"Is that a Bible, uncle?"

"Yes. It is God's word, which I always find the best commentary upon his works;—they explain each other."

"I love the Bible too, uncle," said Edward, "and got much credit for my answering on Scripture questions last half year."

"And which, Edward, afforded you the greatest satisfaction, the Scriptures, or the credit you got for studying them?"

Edward looked a little embarrassed and did not immediately reply.

"It is quite right to take pleasure in the well-earned approbation of your teachers," continued Mr. Lewis, "and I was glad to hear that you obtained a premium at the last examination also."

"Yes, uncle, but not the prize I wished for. There was a Roman History that I should have

liked better, and it was just of equal value with the Bible that I got."

"How of equal value, Edward?"

"I mean that it was not reckoned a higher prize, and it would have been a nicer book for me."

"Then you had a Bible already?"

"Why, no, uncle, not of my own, but it is easy to borrow one on Sunday; and I had gone through all my Scripture proofs, and do not want it on other days."

"Read these four verses for me," said Mr. Lewis, pointing to the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy and sixth verse.

Edward read:—"And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

"To whom was this commandment given, Edward?"

"To the Jews, uncle."

"Yes; and the word of God, which cannot pass away, is as much binding on us as on them,

in every thing excepting the sacrifices and ceremonies, which foreshowed the coming of the Lord Jesus, and which were done away with, by his death fulfilling all those types and shadows."

"Then," said Edward, "we are commanded to write the Bible on our hands and on our doorposts?"

"No, my dear boy, not literally, but in a figure of speech; as the Lord, when declaring he never will forget Zion, says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." The meaning of the passage you first read is, that we must have the word of God as continually present to our minds as any thing written on our hands, and on every object around us, would be to our bodily sight. And how are we to get our thoughts so occupied by it, Edward?"

"By continually reading it, I suppose," replied Edward, rather sullenly.

"By reading it often, and meditating on it much," said his uncle; "and that we can do without interfering with our other business. How many times a day do you eat, Edward?"

"Three times, sir; at breakfast, dinner, and supper."

"And what you eat at one of these meals is to support you until the next supply; and all the nourishment is dispersed through your whole

frame, and makes you grow and thrive. Is it not so, my boy?"

"Yes, uncle."

"So it is with our spiritual food. By reading, as by eating, we receive what is necessary to nourish our souls; and by meditation, accompanied by silent prayer, the benefit is dispersed through our heart, mind, and feelings, showing its effects in a holy, unblameable, and useful life; just as your fresh color and growing frame prove that you take enough of wholesome food, and that it agrees with you. God has made religion as necessary to the life of our souls as food to that of our bodies; and to those who reject the spiritual food he has prepared for them, he says, "I know thy works; that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

"How can they be dead, uncle, when I see them every day walking about, eating and talking?"

"What threatening did God pronounce, when forbidding Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge?"

"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

"Right; and did they die on the day of their transgression?"

"No, uncle, they lived long after."

"By the act of disobedience, Adam lost that spiritual life which was given to him when cre-

ated after the image of God, and became dead in trespasses and sins. Read the first verse of the second chapter of Ephesians."

"And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins."

"Now read the fortieth verse of the fifth chapter of John's Gospel."

"And ye will not come to me that ye might have life."

"It is the Lord Jesus who says that, to the unbelievers who reject his word. Turn to the fifteenth chapter and fifth and sixth verses."

Edward read, "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

"Now," said Mr. Lewis, "do not all these passages tend to the same proof, that men are dead in the sight of God, until quickened, by his mighty power, unto newness of life, and sustained in it by the same power?"

"But will the Bible quicken us, uncle?"

"The Bible shows us, at once, our danger, and the way of escape. It proves that we are sinful, lost, ruined creatures, without hope, and without power to save ourselves. It tells us that

the just and holy God will assuredly punish sin, and can admit nothing evil into his presence. It represents to us the wonderful mercy of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who, to deliver us from the wrath of Jehovah, took our nature upon him; and being himself pure and without spot, offered himself up as a sacrifice for our sins, and a ransom for our souls. It sets before us what we must believe and do: exhibits the snares and perils that the great enemy of God and man surrounds us with; and teaches us how to resist him and to escape them. It exhorts us to prayer, and gives us encouragement, example, and matter for our prayers. Without prayer you cannot obtain any spiritual blessing, nor maintain any communion with God; and without reading the Scriptures you will have little desire to pray. We are like people wandering in the dark, while the Bible is as a bright lamp held out to direct us in the only safe path. You cannot be a child of God if you do not his will; you cannot do it unless you know it, and it is by the Bible he is pleased to communicate that knowledge. Do you begin to see, Edward, that the Bible is more suitable to be an every-day book than your profane history?"

"Why, yes, uncle; but the Bible is a grave book, and if I read it so constantly I never should be merry."

"There is no merriment in hell, Edward; and that dreadful place will be your portion if you neglect the great salvation which the Scriptures set forth. Besides, there is no foundation for what you suppose to be the effect of reading the Bible. I have known people naturally melancholy and discontented, become cheerful and happy by studying it; but I never, in my life, saw an instance of a person becoming unhappy because he had a good hope of going to heaven."

Edward paused a moment, and then said, "Uncle, I remember it is written concerning wisdom, that 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.'"

"Most true, my dear boy, 'quietness and assurance for ever' is the portion of God's people. 'Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again, I say, rejoice.' 'The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' Are such expressions as these likely to make us gloomy, Edward?"

"Oh no, uncle; and I often wonder that you, who suffer so much pain, and read the Bible constantly, are not melancholy."

"How can I be melancholy, Edward, when this Bible tells me that all these things are working together for my spiritual good? That

He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will with him also freely give us all things. When I think on what my sins deserve, and see the Lamb of God bearing the chastisement that should fall on me, how can I be melancholy? When I feel that the Spirit of God is bringing these things to my remembrance, and enabling me to love the Lord Jesus, who has done so much for me, must I not rejoice? I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; and since God has promised a new heart and a new nature to all who seek that blessing through his Son; and since I feel assured that I have sought that blessing, and feel peace and joy in believing, surely the song of praise, not the moan of lamentation, becomes me. Yet I do lament, Edward, daily lament my many offences against this holy Lord God, my Savior and my Redeemer; but I am assured that his blood cleanseth from all sin, and that in him I have a powerful and all-prevailing Advocate with the Father. I know in whom I have believed, and that he will never cast off nor forsake me. I am sinking into the grave, but I do not shrink from that prospect, because the sting of death is taken away, and the grave vanquished by my Savior, who died for my sins, and rose again for my justification; and when this body returns to dust my spirit will en-

ter into his presence, and rejoice there evermore."

Edward looked at the animated countenance of his uncle, and then cast down his eyes; they were full of tears. At last he said, "Uncle, indeed I am a very sinful boy, doing many things that I know are wrong, and neglecting the Bible, because I know it would show me my sin, and the consequences of it. But I will trifle no more with God's displeasure. I will get that precious Bible, worth a thousand Roman histories, and I will read it daily, with prayer to God that I may be made wise unto salvation."

Mr. Lewis did not live long after this. He died, rejoicing in hope of eternal life; and as often as little Edward was permitted to return home from his school, he was to be seen under the old oak, with the Bible in his hand, from which he learned more and more the will of his God and Savior—the utter sinfulness of his own nature—his inability to help himself; and from this holy Word he learned to place all his dependance on the righteousness of his Savior—to follow the example of his Savior, in prayer, in resignation, and in doing good to the poor around him.

He often thought of his dear uncle as one amongst the heavenly host, and counted that day happy when he sat to listen to his kind advice, which, as a means, brought him to the knowledge of himself and of his Almighty Father.

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